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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 000236

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SUBJECT: CZECH MFA EASTERN EUROPE DIRECTOR ON THE BALKANS

Classified By: POL M-C Christopher Davis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: In a dinner with Poloff February 18, Czech MFA Eastern and Southeastern Europe Director Tomas Szunyog was most interested in learning U.S. views about Bosnia. While acknowledging that a decision to close the Office of the High Representative (OHR) was unlikely at the March Peace Implementation Council (PIC) meeting, Szunyog expressed his interest in seeing a decision reached by the June PIC meeting. Szunyog believes Serbia will relent in its opposition to Kosovo independence once a decision from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is reached and Serbia resumes the EU accession process. He reported that Croatia will most likely seek an ICJ decision related to its maritime border dispute with Slovenia and suggested that Albania would be more cooperative on contentious issues such as the lustration law if the U.S. were to suggest that this could affect Albanian NATO accession. Szunyog said that the Western Balkans would figure prominently at the March Gymnich, the Czech MFA considering inviting the Foreign Ministers (FMs) of all Balkan states to the informal for a working lunch. End Summary.

Bosnia

¶2. (C/NF) Szunyog was most interested in learning whether there was any change in U.S. views on an eventual OHR closure, given recent progress on the Brcko issue. While acknowledging that a closure decision was unlikely at the March PIC due to the unresolved status of state and defense property, and with the selection of a new EU Special Representative ongoing, Szunyog expressed hope that one could be reached during the June PIC. To underscore this point, Szunyog explained that it would be nice to resolve the issue before the Swedish presidency as FM Bildt was even more interested in a speedy OHR closure.

Kosovo and Serbia

¶3. (C/NF) On Kosovo, Szunyog agreed that the EU Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) needed to make its presence felt throughout the country, especially in the north. In his view, the Serbs will mellow in their opposition to all things Kosovo once the ICJ process becomes more clear, Szunyog expressing hope that any finding would be sufficiently vague to allow everyone to declare victory. In his view, the Serbs will ultimately relent and this will become clear in their membership application since the first question in the EU's membership application requires applicants to define their territory/population.

¶4. (C/NF) Regarding EU Enlargement Commissioner Rehn's February 12 visit to Belgrade, Szunyog confirmed that Rehn

met with Serbian President Tadic privately and passed the message that Serbian FM Jeremic's antics were not going over well in Brussels. He did not know if Rehn passed a message tying better cooperation with EULEX in the north with Serbian EU aspirations. Concerning Jeremic, Szunyog said he never knew which Jeremic he would be dealing with at a given meeting, Szunyog describing Jeremic as being "very cordial" at some and "very unprofessional" at others.

Slovenia-Croatia Border Dispute

15. (C/NF) On the Slovenia-Croatia border dispute, Szunyog did not believe that the Croats would be interested in any EU-sponsored arbitration efforts as "they believe they have a strong case they can win if they go the ICJ route." To get the Croats to come around, Szunyog suggested that the Croats would want some sort of political guarantee. He cautioned that the Slovenian parliament's recent ratification of Croatian NATO accession might not totally be over, suggesting that referendums (binding or non-binding) were always a possibility in Slovenia as only 15,000 signatures were necessary to make this happen. Szunyog also reported that he expected the ICTY situation to clear up by March, possibly reducing United Kingdom and Dutch opposition to the opening of further accession chapters.

March Gymnich

16. (C/NF) Concerning the March Gymnich, Szunyog said that

BRUSSELS 00000236 002 OF 002

over half of the second day (March 28) will be dedicated to a forum on the Western Balkans. He indicated that the MFA was inclined to invite all Balkan FMs to participate in a working lunch following the morning session, there still being discussion about how to invite Hyseni and still keep the Serbs on board. Szunyog said that Czech FM Schwarzenberg was "personally involved" in the issue, not only because it was one of the Czech presidency's three foreign policy objectives, but because the FM has a deep conviction that Balkan stability is essential to European stability.

Albania

17. (C/NF) Szunyog reported that the Albanians have told the Czech presidency to expect their membership application in March. Concerning the lustration law and other issues with the Albanians, Szunyog suggested that if there were any suggestion from the U.S. that this could create problems for NATO accession, these issues would "disappear."

MURRAY

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